THEME: PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Panopticon: Evolution of Theory and Phenomenon of 'Placemaking of 'Elder-Friendly' Incidental Places in Contemporary Urban Neighbourhoods

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Abstract— **Much before the modern functionalism 'form follows function', panopticon emerged as one of the earliest architectural concept where space configuration derived from optical connection for implementing power to control. In due course of time, the concept extended to various applications and philosophies, criticized for the attitude behind it and adapted for contemporary place design. This study tracks the trail of the evolution of the concept and connects it with a present phenomenon of placemaking of the elderly people in various urban locations. The empirical studies of observation and interviews with the participants evidently reveal that the behavioral pattern follows panoptic connection in placemeking. The findings ratify that the concept originally emerged as spatial model for implementing power to control is today widely and wisely used design theory for placemaking evolving through natural behavioral pattern.**

Keywords – Panopticon; placemaking; elder-friendly; incidental places

INTRODUCTION

Panopticon emerged as one of the earliest architectural concept where space configuration derived from optical connection for implementing power to control. Gradually, with waves of time and ideas, panopticon concept transformed radically from its original purpose to multi-fold complex and debatable issues beyond spatial configuration of surveillance to a notion of control of power by a hidden or invisible authority as well as for user-centric social place design. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), an English philosopher and reformer coined the term panopticon in 1786, proposed a circular prison design where a central tower allows constant surveillance of the inmates. The term derived from Panoptes, who was a giant with hundred eyes in Greek mythology, with meaning of "pan" as "all" and "opticon" as "of or for sight", referring 'to see all around' from the central location. This discourse tracks the trail of the evolution of the concept and connects it with urban design theory through a present phenomenon of placemaking of the elderly people in various urban locations.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT

A. Circular structure with centralized control of power

Jeremy Bentham who coined the term and was credited as the originator of panopticon design, actually, borrowed the idea from his brother Samuel who originally invented the 'central inspection principle' to facilitate the training and supervision of unskilled workers in Russia. The beginning thus was for the workplace design for industrial production. Samuel built a circular inspection building at the hub of a larger compound as a technique of allowing a small number of managers to supervise the activities of a large and unskilled work force working around it (Steadman, 2012). Samuel had an objective for this idea to employ a few managers to control many laborers, marked the beginning of surveillance building based on panoptic or visual link. Panopticon concept in spatial design following a specific function was originated more than a century before iconic functionalism 'form follows function' coined by Louis H Sullivan in 1896.

B. Workplace to prison Design

Jeremy Benthem adapted his brother's idea of panoptic control in designing an architectural design model for prison building in 1786. He designed a massive multi-story circular structure comprised of cells along the external circular wall facing inward to an elevated central watch tower or 'inspection house' at the center. The model was based on panopticon, a system of surveillance in a fixed central location with panoptic view in all directions to the prisoners locked in the cells around.

His objective of a utilitarian prison model was emerged from his subjective standpoint of psychology of behaviour, believing that people behave better when they think that they are being under constant surveillance, and he considered that it would have an overwhelming impact on convicts, encouraging them to reform their lives for the better. He further elaborated that such arrangement would not require any guard to watch as the central tower itself automatically would pose psychological pressure to the prisoners constantly perceiving of being watched round the clock, additionally might reform behavior of the prisoners even with absence of any guard. He justified

about economic gain of requiring fewer staff for effective control in the prison in comparison to the traditional arrangement, where it is assumed that presence of a guard needed all the time (Steadman, 2007).

In spite of the fact that he developed and refined this model for sixteen years and proposed as ideal option of jail design, the British government never accepted the model and panopticon prison was never built in England in his lifetime, but inspired America and few European countries to build circular prison of Bentham model in later period (Steadman, 2007).
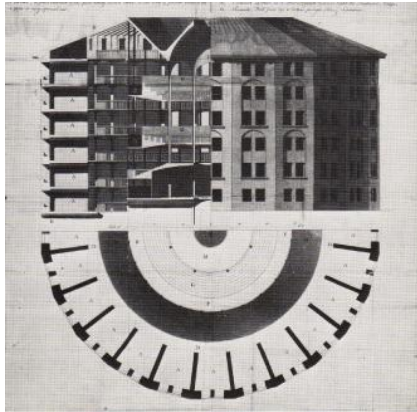

Fig. 1: Jeremy Bentham's idea of panoptic prison
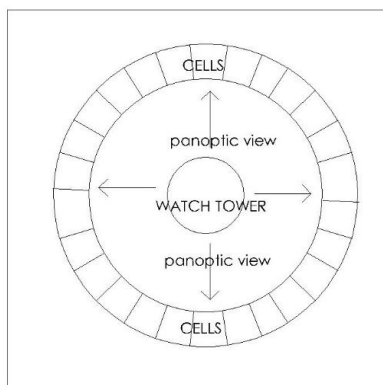Source: https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/jbs/article/id/740/

Fig. 2: Circular design of prison: Jeremy's idea
Source: author

Criticism & Transformation: Jeremy's spatial concept of centralized control in a circular building raised critical issues as:

- prisoners might manage to seize entrances and trap the staff at the central inspection house
- central building to be made free from any other functions for clear view to the cells around, resulting in waste of space
- guard from inspection house cannot see the outside walls of the prison building from where prisoners might attempt to escape
- prisoners can see into cells across the central space and can communicate (Steadman, 2007).

C. Circular to radial

After the study of American circular jail building and findings by the British Government, an alternative of radial pattern to circular prison building was initiated. Pentonville prison in north London was the first radial jail was designed in 1842. A panopticon-inspired layout of different geometry, was featuring a central observation block with radiating wings of cells. The centralised surveillance was different from the Jeremy's circular jail, but aimed for constant, yet unseen surveillance to promote self-regulation among the inmates. It became an exemplar and a model of prisons and built across the world with different number of wings and length to accommodate required number of cells. In India, a number of radial prisons were built during colonial era as in Kolkata, Pune, Bengaluru, Andaman Cellular jail.
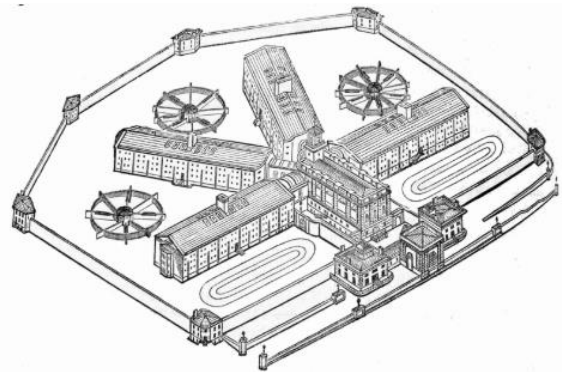

Fig. 3: Pentonville prison, London 1842
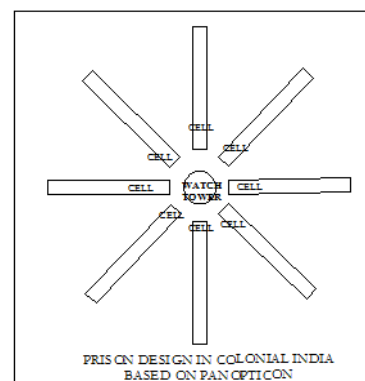Source: https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/jbs/article/id/740/

Fig. 4: Radial design of prison: influenced from Jeremy's panoptic idea
Source: author

Indian prisons built during British colonial era in radial pattern.

Fig. 5: The Cellular Jail, Port Blair, 1896-1906 (now museum) https://en.wikipedia.org

Fig. 6: Yerwada Central Jail, Pune, 1871 https://www.google.com /maps/place/Pune
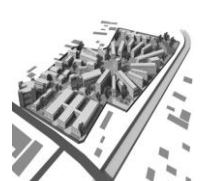
Fig. 7: Alipur Jail Original Plan, Kolkata, 1906 (now museum) https://independenc emuseum.in/

D. Prison to Town Planning: control over the entire colonies

Jeremy's original idea was to reform prisoners for betterment of the society as a whole and with similar notion, he further extended his panopticon idea for settlement planning in European colonies. Spatial organization of centralized control was considered as an ideal model to commandeer and encapsulate a society by the European colonial rulers belonging to so-called disciplinarian societies. One of Bentham's ultimate goals was to create a panopticon town or Panopticon Hill, a construct that would reform and revolutionize the world, envisaging a wider neighbourhood than the prison. European colonists developed power based re-ordering of space with surveillance as the central method to control of its occupants while colonizing several countries (Mitchell, 1991, Michelakos, 2009).

The idea of controlling power was extradited by the European colonists from disciplinary buildings to power-based re-ordering of spaces for mass control in towns. Jeremy Bentham himself advocated to implement panoptic principle in Egypt in the 19th century and the local ruler adopted it. It was witnessed that the citizens were inmates in their own villages, which were built in centralized modular design, to track people and their all daily activities, in subtle manifestation to exercise of power (Mitchell, 1991). The Panopticon became an idealized architectural tool for a range of buildings apart from jail, like for schools, factories, military barracks and even for towns particularly in European colonies. Bentham's panopticon was applied widely by the European colonists in the Caribbean plantation settlements, by introducing centralized spatial planning of a self-sufficient small town locating main house of the planter or overseer at points for panoptic surveillance of agricultural production and for imposing an ordered lifestyle upon the slave population (Michelakos, 2009).

Panopticism was criticized for the persistent inspection, segregation, and spatial ordering of the panoptic management, a new system of capital exploitation of labour and productive efficiency in the Caribbean plantation factory by disciplinary power of European colonialists. The panopticon drifted to a metaphor of centralised dictating power exploiting the weaker society from its original purpose of devising an architectural design for prison.

E. Metaphor & Criticism

The panopticism thus metaphoric to much complex form of power-relation, implying a hierarchal power structure of position, location, visibility and control, dictating the way to behave and forcing to conform to norms in a way that watched ones are never aware of the control it has over them. As a consequence, critics argued of such architectural organization of Bentham's panoticon, resulted an intentional inequality between the watched and watcher, making latter more powerful as a colonizing method to subjugate the former, thus promoting the concept of panopticism (Carlson & Jordan, 2013). Panopticon concept referring to see all around from central location in Jeremy's infamous panoptic jail design became a metaphor, implying to an authoritarian practice to the subjects as punishment.

The questions which arose as who are the watchers and whom, what and why they are the watching became debatable subject in the 20th century. As a result, reactive ideas emerged, particularly on later generations of moral and radical thinkers.

French philosopher and critic Michel Foucault argued in his book Discipline and Punish in 1975, criticized Bentham's panopticon not as a political philosophy of pragmatic reformation of penal system for economic sufficiency and humanitarian intent, but argued that panoptic design gave birth to disciplinary and authoritarian power (Sheridan, 2016). The panopticon become a master trope in criticism as he described as 'cruel, ingenious cage' due to constant and conscious visibility and such reactive idea was influenced in wider fields as in literature, film and politics. Bentham himself developed anti-panopticon idea later in life, where a minister sits in an exposed room and is surrounded by members of the public who listen and ask questions as this transparency holds power to account.

F. Panopticon: positive impact in digital surveillance

With the advent of digital security system of electronic data capture, Bentham's panopticon 'line-of-sight' surveillance design became outdated idea for penal structure, rather incorporated gradually into modern building design through cameras and CCTV as legitimated way for crime prevention. Need for public or mass surveillance is rapidly increasing in public buildings and in various urban places. Panopticism and the Public Eye is one of the important positive strategy for city planning for a safer urban public realm. The panopticon concept applied in positioning cameras, but questionable ethics connecting to Foucaultian principles like hidden human eyes of watcher and access of electronic databases sacrificing freedom and right of privacy, are resolved by informing watcher that they are being watched. Advances in data processing, machine learning and computer vision, surveillance cameras are helping to analyze emotions and behaviours and are also wisely and widely used in urban planning and design (Ozden, 2008).

II. PANOPTICON IN PLACEMAKING BY THE ELDERLY IN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

In Urban design, placemaking is described as the act and art of building places for people. It is primarily a formal, collective and democratic process of making destination places in the community for the people by the people who live or work in or near the place of daily life in the community which promote interaction between people.

In old age, gain is the leisure or free time with less or no commitments, but same leisure poses a great challenge too due to lack of engagements and commitments. Disengagement Theory argues that there is a gradual tendency in old age to withdraw from involvement and participation, leading to many serious challenges of physical, mental and cognitive health. Activity Theory suggests that persuasion of a consistent active social life could enhance quality of later life.

A. A study of 'elder-friendly' 'places in urban neighbourhoods

The author pursued an empirical study of placemaking by the elderly people in their neighbourhoods to identify the attributes of 'elder-friendly' places. The study explored phenomenon of social life of the elderly people in the city of Pune to identify how the elderly people are pursuing consistent leisure lifestyle in social domain and what are the factors which are helping to achieve a better later life. From persistent observations and interviews, it has been found that the elderly

people pursue a social life regularly in the neighbourhood formal places like temples, parks and in incidental places as in roadside benches, low boundary walls or ledges as well as steps of the shops. This study focused on these incidental places or *kattas* (term used in local Marathi language) and survey was conducted in selected *kattas*, both in public and private domains where placemaking occurred by elderly people within their neighbourhoods to identify the attributes of '**elder-friendly' places.**

B. Findings

The observations and interviews with the elderly people particularly in roadside *kattas* where placemaking witnessed, revealed that a consistent pattern of social life found like they were engaged always with same group of people of similar age and gender, sitting in specific location, time and duration almost in all seasons and spending leisure time in sedentary engagements like talking, greeting with acquainted passer by people, watching activities, movement of people and vehicles around. The participants mentioned that

- They preferred sedentary passive activities to spend time without commitment of any fixed activities, and enjoyed sitting on benches to observe the surrounding and company of people of the same age and gender groups to talk. The act of regular interaction was enabling them to make social networks of friends at old age and interaction with empathetic people of similar age and gender groups help to get respect and comfort to express and relieve their emotional burden as well as enhance cognitive capacities.
- They also expressed their strong desire to go out everyday to remain active, independant and to remain connected to the social life in the neighbourhoods for coping up old age related challenges demonstrated their ability to maintain a sense of self-confidence and accomplishment. Walking down from residence to such places are contributors to multifold benefits, firstly, enhancement of the physical mobility, secondly, to be visible in the society as inclusive members and thirdly, also preventing social isolation, resulting in to enhance the quality of life.
- Regular persuasion of social life in *kattas* depends significantly on self-motivation, socio-physical environment and individual factors.
- One of the important 'pull factors' of selection of location of incidental places or *kattas* and place attachment was found as the availability of **panoptic** 'line-of-sight' to watch people and activities around than sitting in quiet areas and motivated them for regular participation.

C. Attributes of 'elder-friendly' places

The study argued that by getting pleasure from comfortable passive sedentary engagement within the society where they live is very significant in supporting 'ageing in place' by manifestation of social inclusion and inter-generational solidarity for the older adults. Informal and incidental settings or hang-out places where elderly people gather and socialize with neighbours and friends regularly in proximate environment closer to house as restaurants, tea or similar stalls, temples, parks, *kattas* as roadside benches and other incidental sitting areas are recognized as 'places in ageing'. In environmental gerontology, placemaking in such 'places in ageing' play an important role in 'ageing in place' which is an

appropriate option for the elderly people to pursue a decent quality of later life.

This study finds the relation of panoptic views with placemking by the elderly people in preferring incidental places. The 'elder-friendly' places are referring to both physical and social environments that facilitate elders' participation with independence, promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles, build self-esteem and personal satisfaction. The attributes of 'elder-friendly' places are found as:

- Physical attributes: Both in public and particularly in private domain, places were preferred where access was not restricted ensuring a sense of dignity. Barrier-free physical condition is fundamental requirement like devoid of physical obstructions such as level differences or uneven, wet or slippery walking surfaces crucial to negotiate with challenging health condition in later age. Apart from cleanliness, there are other factors identified as a sense of 'safety' perceived due to the location and presence of public eyes that made them to feel comfortable to congregate and spend leisure time. Interestingly, other spatial comfort attributes as shed to protect unpleasant weather conditions, landscape etc. were not found as important in placemaking as over observing **panoptic** view of the surroundings in these places.
- Sitting arrangements: prime requirement is to sit and talk, benches on the footpath and along roads, or in informal places like roadside ledges or low boundary walls, verandah of houses and even steps of shops when closed in the morning were used. **Panoptic** orientation of sitting towards the direction of activities were preferred to get glimpses of diverse happenings around them and simultaneously getting themselves involved in socialization with friends.
- Location played an important role in preferring the places, usually near and clearly visible busy activity generating places as temples, shops, hawkers' markets on footpath, parks, and near road junctions from where **panoptic** view of the surrounding diverse activities, movement of people and vehicle could be watched. Many busy areas were found favoured places even ignoring crowd, noise and air pollutions as well as compromising safety in terms of vehicular and human movement which might pose danger to this fragile population.

Fig. 8: Steps of shops (semi-private area)   Fig. 9: Roadside benches (public area)   Fig 10: Benches in semi-public park
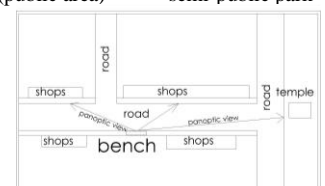

Fig. 11: Panoptic view   Fig. 12: Panoptic view

Source: author

CONCLUSION

The panopticon model originated as an architectural configuration for designing penal building with constant surveillance. It was criticized as an infamous divisive tool for implementation of power to control by the authoritative watchers to create constant pressure to the oppressed watched ones. In urban design, panoptic view is widely and wisely adapted as a design strategy for placemaking. The concept of panopticon gets a new dimension in placemaking particularly for the older adults in the urban neighbourhoods, where it becomes an inclusive tool to connect elderly watchers with the society.

Adaptation to socio-physical changes for the esteemed senior population is challenging, and not a foreseeable rather a clear future as predicted by the United Nations is the challenges of Population Ageing in the world. The need for 'elder-friendly' places are need to ensure graceful ageing within the society.

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